

## Earth-Friendly Gardening & Landscaping



# Tasty Trellises & Appetizing Arbors

Recently, upscale horticultural venues have been tempting gardeners and their wallets with an exciting array of prefabricated arches, arbors, and trellises, often with exquisite designs and metal finishes which echo the costly wrought-iron structures found in estate gardens. In addition, there are also less expensive wooden options, should you forgo an expedition to Smith and Hawken. Whatever your budget, if you envision a trellis in your future, consider treating yourself to some of the tasteful — and tasty — climbers best suited for vertical gardening.

One of the fastest growing and genuinely interesting candidates is hops (*Humulus lupulus*), a dioecious, perennial vine best known for its cone-shaped and intensely aromatic flowers or hops, called strobiles, which not only provide important elements of bitterness, bouquet, and flavor in well-crafted beer, but also fulfill a centuries-old role as a natural preservative.

Beyond the brewery, hops are appreciated for the tender, pencil-thin shoots that emerge from the "crown" or root stock each spring. English settlers enjoyed harvesting and eating them like asparagus, as do many gourmets today, such as the Belgians who substitute hops for asparagus in their gratinee sauces.

Hops' species name, *lupulus*, derives from its "wolf-like" habit of running rampant over trees and shrubs in the wild. In fact, the vine can grow up to 25 or 30 feet by mid-summer, quickly providing welcome shade and privacy when trained to a trellis or pergola. The vines attach themselves to most any structure with twining tendrils, and are covered with an abundance of raspy, light green leaves. Later in the summer, the pale green flower cones will emerge, turning golden as autumn arrives.

Among the most ornamental and highly regarded varieties is Cascade, closely followed by Chinook, Kent Golding, Mount Hood, and Willamette, as well as Nugget, whose compact clusters of cones can be dried on the vine and later used in flower arrangements. Keep in mind that hops are only produced on a female vine, and male plants are generally unnecessary. Usually, one or two vines are more than sufficient for even the largest arbor structure.



The hardy kiwi vine is another excellent selection which will provide lush shade within one season, in addition to fabulously sweet and smooth skinned fruits. Incidentally, don't confuse these aromatic delights with their hairy cousins from down-under. Hardy kiwis produce abundant crops of fruit more reminiscent of grapes in size and growth habit. They can also be popped right in your mouth as a special treat as you stroll under the nearly cavernous canopy of vines, or allowed to dry like figs.

According to Mike McConkey, perhaps the foremost breeder of kiwis in the country, one of the best choices for this area is Issai, which is self-fertile and will produce fruit without an attendant male vine, although planting at least one male is recommended to ensure ample fruit production, especially as birds will often share your crop with you — albeit uninvited.

Anna is another favorite variety, and is perhaps the most productive and attractive of vines. A colleague and I planted several, including a requisite male, and have since watched those vines cover and conquer both a substantial pergola and the better portion of the large building to which it was attached. Anna also features ruby red petioles, which provides a subtle bit of color to enjoy before the fruits arrive in late summer.

Grapes are worth considering, although they generally require more care and attention than some other species, and can also create a bit of a mess as fruits drop to the ground.

If you crave a shady retreat for Bacchus, at least look for varieties offering a combination of disease-resistance, heat tolerance, and great flavor. And why not get fancy? Rather than going for a predictable concord grape, consider *Villard Blanc*, a key varietal for French white wines, which also turns heads as an ornamental with great taste.

Passionflower or maypop (*Passiflora incarnata*) became one of my favorite fast-growing perennial vines within the first year I planted it. Like hops, the vine will die back to the ground in winter, but throughout the growing year, you will marvel at the intricate twining ways of the plant's aggressive tendrils. However, nothing can truly prepare you for experience of watching the first flower of the season open, which it will gladly do before your very eyes.

It is undoubtedly the showiest native flower in our region, and perhaps the most alien, too. A fantasy of purple and lavender petals and sepals open like a proscenium, setting forth a dizzying ring of long fringe-like filaments. Get close enough to the cream-colored stamens and stigmas and enjoy a whiff of citrus. As summer progresses, scores of blooms will be replaced by two-inch long pale green fruits. Wait until they pull away with a gentle touch to ensure freshness - and then prepare to enjoy a flavor most likened to wild apricots, which is yet another common name for this species.

Raspberries can be handsomely trained to trellises for screening or as a living accent piece in the garden.

Extensive breeding of this most popular of brambles has resulted in a wide variety of plants which often combine disease resistance with a broad palette of colors, flavors, fruit size, and ease of cultivation. Some juicy options include Heritage Red Fall, an everbearing variety that produces fruit from mid-to- late summer through late fall. Yellow Everbearing provides a rich lemon-yellow to golden color and long season, as does Anne. For a traditional red raspberry, think of Caroline, another everbearer, or go with Jewel Black for large, dark, shiny fruits.

And don't forget that there are annuals which can also offer some excellent coverage, whether for a trellis in your vegetable garden, or as a quick-climbing vine to shade and cool a south-facing window. An outstanding favorite is hyacinth bean, with deep purple stems, purplish-green leaves, lavender blooms, and dark purple, leathery pea-pods, which are edible if cooked thoroughly. Another is the scarlet runner bean, with bright scarlet red flowers and edible beans on a vine with light green leaves. The flowers are also an effective attractant for hummingbirds, as are those of its cousin, 'black runner,' which offers both crimson flowers and deep black seeds.

### Plant Sources

Among the numerous mail-order nurseries (and local garden centers) which offer edible vines, consider: Edible Landscaping, 361 Spirit Ridge Lane, Afton, VA 22920, 434.361.9134, [eat-it.com](http://eat-it.com); and Nichols Garden Nursery, 1190 Old Salem Road NE, Albany, Oregon 97321, 800.422.3985, [nicholsgardennursery.com](http://nicholsgardennursery.com).



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